
Delirious Gaudí – The Fate of an Architectural Symptom

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Introduction

Delirious Gaudí considers the works of the famous architect of Barcelona as «a mountain of evidences without manifesto» (as claimed by Rem Koolhaas of Manhattan in his famous essay¹ of 1978) not in the manner of a non-existent statement of Gaudí, but rather as delusional or hallucinatory signs of a highly qualified person, firstly interpreted as symptoms, and in the sense of a psychoanalytic characterization of the role of the architect.

From an academic position, the review that a committee of beatification² has set up to look into Gaudí's biography can not be dismissed. Once some miracles are proved and approved by the Vatican, this singular claim will finish with the elevation of Gaudí to the condition of Blessed and Holy. Some instances of Catalan Catholicism hope to accomplish that in the year of 2016, and

1. Koolhaas R. *Delirious Manhattan, A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1978.
2. The Association pro Beatification of Antoni Gaudí, 2016. Gaudibeatificatio. [online] Available at: <http://gaudibeatificatio.com/> [Accessed 27 March 2016]

in no way such vision hinders other opinions about the life and the architecture of the architect.

When observing any phantasmagoria, for psychoanalysts it's crucial the understanding of the patient versus his symptoms, more than the symptoms by their own. But because he was not neurotic, to consider the buildings of Gaudí as symptoms would seem strange. Neurotic raving it's different from psychotic delirium; and it's different a perverse instance from a neurotic instance with traces of perversity. The abundance of stimuli provided by the genius of Gaudí on the one hand, and the tentative enumeration of his miracles, on the other, recall us that perversion is tuned up by social values always colored by the mechanism of sublimation, which in psychoanalysis has a technical meaning.

This text asserts that symptom is too mundane; and that sublimation promises more. Whether a word or a concept, sublimation in the Catholic religion presents a static vector (what Rome sublimates, it remains sublimated *per seculorum secula*), but in psychoanalysis sublimation has a movable condition. Sublimation involves an ideal, which implies more expectation, so it could be said that a synergy exists between the two planned processes, one being overly ambitious –pointing to canonize the architect–, and the other being virtually academic –outlining a psychoanalytic reading of a disputed architect.

Just as some members of the clergy are now figuring out how God speaks in miracles (according to the method of the Roman Congregation for the Causes of the Saints), in the same way, it's crucial in psychoanalysis, and especially in neurosis, that the frame of a diagnosis could «talk» or provide hints to organize the treatment of a disturbance; because in analysis the symptoms for themselves don't make up the structure of a particular diagnosis, as they do in other clinical criteria.

Another overall arrangement, or holistic approach to Gaudí, deserves a treatment in psychoanalysis. Within the resolution of the Oedipus complex a general scheme is left in the subject which is called in French *fantasme*. Here the Father figure has been surpassed, or transposed, by a virtual instance. With the support of the *fantasme* (a species of necrotic ghost memorized in the psyche) the subject is vested the power to constitute a privileged image in which the genital satisfactions he experience will be modulated (in Lacan words). This immaterial scheme is a support for the drive and involves a splitting, so that the concerned subject holds desire at the price of alienating himself within the *fantasme*.

Cleavage, the *fantasme*, and the role of the Other, all of them lead to a similar understanding to clinical structures where the symptoms (neurosis) are not under discussion initially, but rather some associated «elementary phenomena», call these delusions, hallucinations, or manifestations of «creativity insight». Thus, Gaudí's work gives us a research paradigm when scrutinizing a creator's mental itinerary. The latter can be a trodden field in psychoanalysis, but it's almost an unexplored territory in architecture. In this sense, here it's not about manipulating a context or a general opinion put together upon certain data, but to determine how the opinions already accepted could outline that context. To attest what constitutes a miracle (in terms of what can be granted as miraculous by the Church) or to establish if there are «good» psychic instances in Gaudí's architecture per se, both seem collateral efforts.

Although we are not focussed on neurosis, a general psychoanalytic approach to that pathology initially reveals the figure of Gaudí very close to his sociocultural context. In fact, his biography-palimpsest holds a lot of questions not deciphered yet. For one, it's unclear if Gaudí's foremost purpose was trying to thrive on the rigid social hierarchy of his time —coming from a rural and

modest family. Also, it's unclear if Gaudí loved or hated nature. At the end of the 19th century, in aesthetic circles, fear of ornament was matched only by the fear of lack of ornament —by what art historian Alois Riegl termed a «horror vacui.» By most accounts, ornament first emerged as a response to a primitive terror of nature.

A bundle of problems are opened on the interpretations of Gaudí. A psychoanalytic perspective may allow to expand the debate on one of the most controversial architect of all times.

A miracle is a miracle

The news that have lasted about Gaudí's life are scarce and sometimes contradictory. We can not sit on a couch Gaudí; actually we know very little about him with the exception of some phrases pulled out from a compendium of personal anecdotes facilitated by people that were close to the celebrity. Indeed Gaudí's personal files were destroyed in a fire during the Spanish Civil War.

Outside the study of his buildings numerous miraculous events of Gaudí are known. Such outpouring of occurrences contrasts with the scarcity of information their professional biographers bemoan always. The starting signal of the beatification process (which hopes to succeed in 2016) was apparently the cure of the worker Josep Campderrós, who in 1905 fell into a barrel of acid and healed mysteriously, although Gaudí was not there. Meanwhile, a neighbor of Canet de Mar (Barcelona) said that the architect had helped him to heal a bleeding ulcer, but his plea was dismissed by the Court of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. In another case, a woman from Reus said she recovered the sight because of her devotion to Gaudí, and her

testimony was accepted. Also there was sent to the Court a «positio», ie, a list of over a thousand pages collecting pledges of individuals who knew Gaudí and certified his holiness.

«They are thousands. Gaudí met many people and on his death his reputation for holiness was very large. We still have to finish the job and Rome has to study it, but we believe that in six years there may be a decision» said in 2010 the postulator Josep Maria Tarragona, who wrote the report.

For the Gaudí Probeatificación Association it makes sense figuring out what a miracle is, at least under the Roman law. Besides, if environmental circumstances are going to be determinant for the historians of the Association, as they are, nothing prevents establishing a correlation between this course of acts and the most ordinary reception of the work of the Catalan architect. In art and history environmental circumstances have an influence. We know that in art and architecture those circumstances are discussed with perseverance certainly.

Then, facing the question «how a miracle is distinguished?» let's overlap a new one: «how an art object can be distinguished from another merely functional?», particularly important in art and architecture. In front of this inquiry, and about beauty, the American professor Arthur Danto (1924-2013) declared that «fetishism» had left for good in the XXth century and as a result it was necessary to abandon the traditional coordinates of aesthetics in favor of sociology³. For Danto, not only the artwork doesn't have intrinsic qualities; but the opinion of critics, historians, curators and art dealers (to whom creators were added) is the most relevant

3. Danto A. *The Abuse of Beauty*. Chicago: Open Court; 2003.

feature to bear in mind. In his view, if the «art world» accepted something as «art,» then it was «art».

Our assumptions do not intend to discuss the ways an artist, generally speaking, has to apprehend reality, a so-called reality that would be seized in an unfamiliar sense for psychoanalysis –either artistic or architectural «reality». We should go back at least to Kant to debate the transcendental schematism in perception, leading to some philosophical incertitudes found on Kantian and neo-Kantian thinkers (Cassirer, Bakhtin... perhaps Freud himself) when talking about these issues. Also, in an guaranteed dispute, these waters would lead us to numerous and eminent Kojevians readers of Hegel, etc. (including Lacan).

For the sake of pragmatism it's seems more feasible to ask: To what extent the reception of Gaudí that predominates in society today has become «thaumaturgical»? Or, expressed in the canonical-religious terms that perhaps would use the press to echo the imminent beatification of Gaudí: can the earnest expectation of a miracle, produce the miracle itself?

In our interpretive quest, and considering a historic context, Baudrillard seems a worthwhile counterpart. At the end of postmodernism Jean Baudrillard defined *kitsch* as something being oriented to mass media⁴. For Baudrillard, the *kitsch* is a kind of multipurpose rest, a common denominator of the information era, something that can establish a satisfactory relationship with anyone, with anything, and no matter the past of that *something* (let's recall now that *art-nouveau* architecture had been a new-rich fancy in Barcelona). According to this framework —stuff is wonderful if it can be disseminated— has Gaudí become *kitsch* on the face of the

4. Baudrillard J. *La Société de Consommation*. Paris: Éditions Denoël; 1970.

world? Baudrillard points out that the *kitsch* is oriented to the proliferation of images, images that currently fall over the citizens as an avalanche of signs of signs (*qua* networks). And the *kitsch* imagery has a *minimum minimum* sociopolitical and cultural payload everywhere. Granted, Gaudí dealt somehow with the sophisticated discourse on ornament of his *zeitgeist*, but reading the tourism statistics of Barcelona, at the end he fits in the Baudrillard's picture nicely. Let's say that it's difficult to evade the big wave of so-called globalization, and less so its foam.

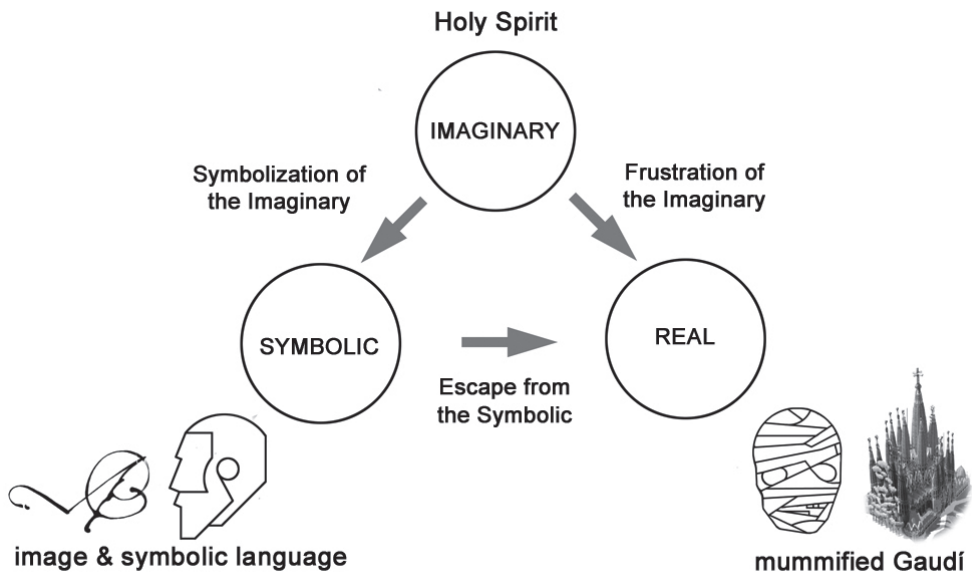
Basic Lacan

Is there a substrate minimally objective or intellectually plausible to make a judgement of the fantasy of Gaudí? In our opinion, despite the critical value given to his work, there is one, and it's very educational in order to comprehend the whole discipline of architecture. This substrate is isolatable and helps understanding both the unknown nature of gaudinism and the unspeakable perverse *fantasme* linked to the debris that Lacanian theory assigns to the Real (a similar argument was suggested by the book 'Gary Cooper, architect'⁵, an essay on the classic movie *The Fountainhead*). Within the Lacanian device for Significance-Symbolizing, the Real is corresponding to the «trash» expelled by the civilization, a term used by George Bataille that aligns with the wreck mentioned by Walter Benjamin in his famous thesis, i.e., a notion similar (by coercion, excess, and waste) to the very kitsch concept of Baudrillard that may represent the lion's share of current architecture.

5. de la Puente J. *Gary Cooper Arquitecto, Teorías Psicoanalíticas en Arquitectura*. Barcelona: JMP Martorell; 1993.

But psychoanalyzing Gaudí makes us understand architecture as a complex mental operation. The concept of fantasy does not correspond to a subconscious indulgence, that is, a mere bonus to compensate the desire censored by the reality principle, or by the principle of the Law, as the first Freud explained. Jacques Lacan introduced another meaning of reality.

For Lacan⁶, the Real is combined to the Imaginary and the Symbolic in a dynamic force field. In the hallucinatory realization of desires prohibited by Law (which founded the signifier), Lacan sees no compensation at all for this suspension-transgression, but the very act of transgression, which involves symbolic castration. Fantasy, after all, strives to represent the «impossible»



6. Lacan J. *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*. Paris: Editions du Seuil; 1973.

scene of castration, says Lacan. Fantasy is elusive in the behavior of most practitioners of the so-called fine arts who are close to perversion (but only close, as Vincent Van Gogh was); and yet, due to their exceptional elaboration, our plea is that the instances of the architecture fantasy point out to the *fantasme* of the perverse ritual, which enacts castration differently. This moniker, castration, is used by psychoanalysis to refer to a first loss that catalogues the neurotic individual as a single marauder of the perversion field –with the purported aim of entering the symbolic order.

Gaudí's biography can be emblematic in the sense of placing the Architect into the perverse path, a path which is beyond the transactional manipulation that fantasy seems to have for the neurotic mind, for the «artist», usually stained by mundane instances, i.e. the money collected for his activities. If in Lacanian psychoanalysis the psychotic subject is he who lost his fantasy, a brilliant architect like Gaudí is the one who looses his *fantasme* into seemingly psychotic raids. Apparently, purportedly, because the goal of the architect task is perverse, we said. Although the architect's alibi can be the remuneration of the projects, and that salary would return him for a moment to the populated world of neurosis, it's a fiction, that it's not his world. It's not his Law either. Gaudí is «asymptomatic» under that consideration by the way, but only in one respect: in as much as his anchoring in the perverse fantasy is clearer, more fixed, more dramatic. Gaudí despised money.

As we know, in both Saint Paul (*Epistle to the Romans*) and in Lacan, the Law not only limits the satisfaction of our desires, but is also the matrix of our desires. You desire something precisely because the law forbids it. Nonetheless the pervert makes a particular use of the law in order to desire and enjoy, in contrast to the subject to whom the Law works as the agent of his desire (connoting access to the forbidden). For the pervert

the object of desire is the Law itself, because the Law is the ideal he longs for: he wants to be fully recognized by it, he ardently aspires to join its inner workings. Technically, the perverse people invent their law.

The career of many artists executors rubs into irony, and sometimes their forays within painting, within sculpture, etc., are in fact seeking a transaction with the Imaginary under a neurosis allegedly called *fetish*, or under any other obsessional neurosis, even with delirious wraths involved. Slavoj Žižek⁷, a Lacanian follower, explains the role of fantasy as «...mediation between the formal symbolic structure and the positivity of objects we encounter in reality —providing a 'schema' according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filling in the empty places opened up by the formal symbolic structure...»⁷. Under the perspective of Lacan the architect would employ every possible strategy, yet ultimately he would appear to us as a pervert *comme il faut*. Our claim is that the basic *fantasme* of the architect (his singular entry into the Imaginary) is the highest ceiling sucked in vain by obsessional neurotics: the paradigm for the «ideation» of the architect is not a fleeting daydream reprimanded or interchanged on behalf of any commodity attained with some causticity, even at the cost of ethical demands (not reflected in the final 'art' anyway). A very representative project of Gaudí, La Pedrera, illustrates the contrast about the fight that neurosis brings along with fantasy, and the neat cleavage that occurs in perversion: it's the uniqueness of the building, it's the complete irrelevance of the surrounding architecture, it's the independence (sacrosanct and miraculous) of a great architect stubborn and hard-headed. All of that reveal no negotiation with desire at all, as in the neurosis

7. Žižek S., *The Plague of Fantasies*. New York: Verso; 1997.

processes, but the defense of a framework of rare status, a sort of solidified, proverbial, petrified, scatological fantasme.

Finally it's careful to say that, in psychoanalysis, *perversion* is taken as an abstract concept and as a non-pejorative professional qualification. Nothing to do, then, with the customary meaning of the term *perversion* that denotes conducts allegedly «deviant».

This is not a game

In a sense Gaudí is not morally reprehensible. His position is firm, never cynical as it has been, and remains so, that one of many contemporary star-architects enemies of all contextualism, those exhibiting a tiny architectural responsibility for the task of homogeneously unite cities, or make them more liveable. Gaudí (who was said to be a drug addict, adept at *Amanita muscaria*) always seemed to give a damn for the context in their projects. His disdain for the architectural *milieu* was intense and frank. He didn't use sarcasm in any of its forms, although he publicly scolded universal artists such as Michelangelo and Raphael. He admired, however, Leonardo.

The most conspicuous stars of tardoposmodernist architecture have never assumed the very rules of the *game*, the playful dimension that Schiller developed with a remarkable theoretical discourse (and later Marcuse, and Gadamer...), a dimension that would permeate attitudes in the proposal, the explanation, and the foreseen assimilation, of presumed artistic high goals. It's our contention that architecture has escaped that duty definitely. Architecture is in the middle of a chaos and has the fate of unavoidable shortness, together with a unavoidable coercion that constrains and strangles the public eye. The idiosyncrasy of the discipline

has become completely transparent (through a sublimated transparency) like turning a glove inside out. The citizen is already led to perceive an object drawn to overcome the collective space for a long, long time. Architecture as a whole is perceived either as an insolent business or as an out-of-place fiction, but not as a social need any longer.

The fictional architect Howard Roark (Gary Cooper) legally demands a colleague for having devalued the original draft of the Cortland homes in the classic movie *The Fountainhead*, which is a most valuable film to examine these questions. The reason is: he could not do otherwise. Gaudí is translucent in this sense indeed. He sues in the court, and with great urgency, the mistress-widow of the Casa Milá for refusing his plan for what became a famous building. Both (Roark and Gaudí) are doomed to prosecute the case according to the rule of law even if this human law is a parody; this is not his game, it has never been, not even it's there the irony of pursuing the condemnation of the *Other* as Lacan would have said. Gaudí is always concerned with a bigger *Other*.

The severity of Gaudí is high, exemplary and, in all senses, «true». It happens that the pervert goes beyond the mundane banality, he is more strict, he doesn't use shallow tactics, he is absolutely determined to his logic, and he expresses complete security on the relevance of his works.

The perverse subject plays only to the benefit of what is unquestionably valuable to him: his *jouissance*, the coordinates of which can not but be defined by him. This voluptuous strategy flirts with psychosis and can hardly be carried out without the complicity (suggested or supposed) of a witness able to attend, overwhelmed, this skilled and fantasmatic maneuver in which it holds himself against castration. A *Third* one, perhaps the

public, is always used and abused in the perversion clinical structure. Gaudí's work rose to endure among mankind, but his attention was longing for God. What vision was his architecture demanding? The one of God, because Gaudí's humility was unhuman, non-existing, completely blind to the challenge and to the contradictions it appeared to involve. He defied his own death. From a rational point of view, and from the psychoanalytical theory, it's not indecorous to say that Gaudí deserves to be saint.

Within the maximum and sublime conceit, the perverse architect is the transgressor par excellence, and so was Gaudí. The architect is the one who scorns the rules of «normal» (a behavior that founds consensus in Significance); he seeks the imposition of new tablets of the Law with a non-negotiable steadiness, and sometimes with severe costs, as in the case of Gaudí. He endorsed his plan with a narcissistic cult that drew his body into rigorous fasts. As it is well known, Gaudí almost lost his life in one of them.

For Catholicism, this form of behavior reflects the incursion of the Holy Ghost in the soul of the individual, because holiness comes from God, who is infinitely large; and He has not confined to himself this gracious virtue, but demands that virtue to men molded in his image and likeness, men who will live an almost unearthly existence out of material nourishment. The presence of the Holy Spirit was the divine *entourage* for Gaudí. The pure presence of the big *Other* required by perversion is impeccable here. Social sublimation would only be a bonus, an aftermath. God appeals heavily to people akin, and gives them the supernatural privilege of being called «saints».

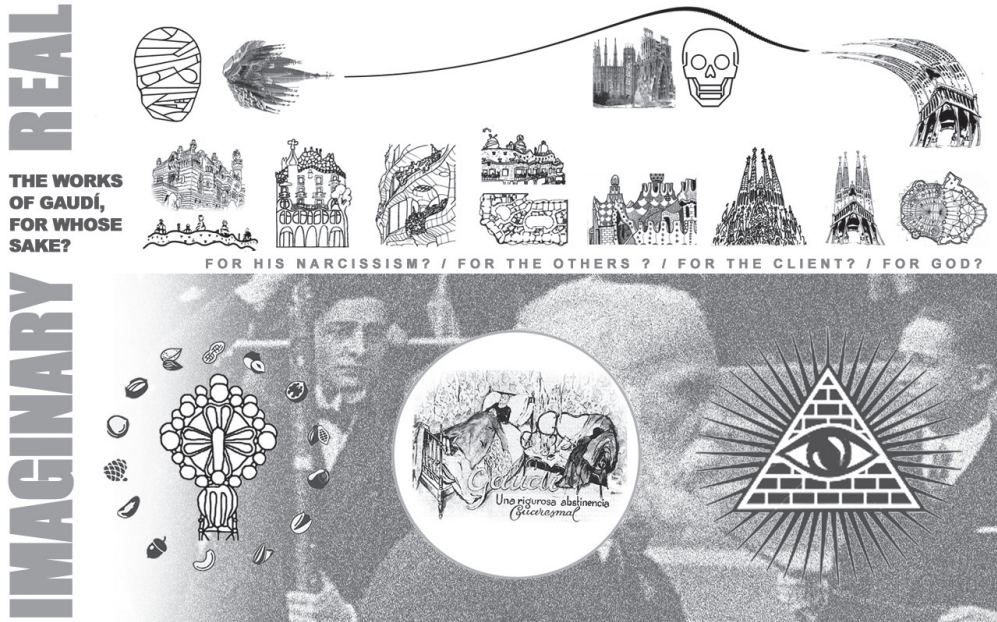
Transfiguration of the Holy Family

In his book «The Silent Partners» the Slovenian essayist Slavoj Žižek⁸ wrote how Nietzsche anticipated the connection between perversion and asceticism, all explaining the concepts of frugality, auto-derision, self-loathing, and the lewd condition of asceticism. He showed the morbidity of this ideal. Nietzsche investigates libido in asceticism, says Žižek, where the ascetic man is cut into pieces although he worships himself as God. In order to reach that goal, the ascetic tends to turn diabolical a remaining part of the body.

If these individuals repudiate what is natural to them, Nietzsche concludes that an enjoyment has been derived from it. It's in fact the *jouissance* that Lacan mentioned in his works repeatedly; and not in vain a worldly pleasure seems to have been present in the young Gaudí; several authors state that he was a dandy who knew drugs at large. Provided that polemical background, what kind of enjoyment could have experienced Gaudí both in the making of his architecture and in his personal life? Could that wondering *jouissance* be detachable of his flamboyant «creativity», in the way that neurotic artists' lives are kept apart from their works sometimes?

An inner split that founds a *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle? A frozen instance with scatological connotations and with an aftermath of social sublimation? What is relevant in the puzzle of Gaudí's existence according to psychoanalysis? In 1883 the publisher and bookseller Josep Maria Bocabella attended the *atelier* of the architect Joan Martorell seeking for someone to continue the Sagrada Família, having dreamed

8. Žižek S. *The Silent Partners*. London: Verso; 2006.



that a man with a «piercing and deep look» was sent by God. At the time the Sagrada Família was an anonymous project that has been just started in Barcelona. Everyone has heard the story. An architect up to the job was found, and Gaudí honored such divine verdict with a titanic decision. Lacanian psychoanalysis positively asserts that clinical structures (neurosis, psychosis, perversion) are fixed and rock-hard from the very beginning.

Coinciding with the yet unbuilt «ruin» of the Holy Family is the concept of body without organs of Deleuze and Guattari⁹, the *corpsification* that Gaudí intensely

9. Deleuze G. & Guattari F., *The Anti-Oedipus*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit; 1972.

looked for during his adult life. This enormous building is considered the flagship of his career, and the thread that ties together all his projects, or, the populist bandage that traps and sodomizes the rest of us. All of us are condemned to suffer or enjoy Gaudí's lucubrations forevermore. Nevertheless, the vicissitudes of his skeleton, the one that historically was becoming Gaudí himself during his life, are unfinished in our own era.

At last the Holy Family structure has concentrated the greatest substance of Gaudí's fantasy, all his *fantasme*. For anyone, the Holy Family should legitimize a candidacy to become saint, ratifying the sacrosanct destiny of the architect in culture. Why otherwise Gaudí stubbornly assumed the nomination for that project, knowing that, in embryonic form first, and later in the most conceivable majestic fashion, it was impossible to build in his time?

Conclusions

The many works of Gaudí are not at issue in this text particularly; his personality is. And it's our belief that the intimate character of Gaudí «creativity» stands for a synthesis of the archetypical mind of the architect of the Western world, the sheer glue that fastens all conceivable projects in the old Vitruvian discipline. This conviction is somehow synchronous and arrives to the own coffin of Gaudí, where his bones are melting and producing an apotheosis of the Lacanian Real. All it's going to be dissolved at an eccentric angle, or *aleph*, located in the «Expiatory Church of the Holy Family» in a certain point of the Eixample of Barcelona.

When enough information has been gathered, the Roman Congregation for the Cause of the Saints will recommend a proclamation of the Gaudí's heroic and

sublimated virtues, as King Vidor did for the Ayn Rand's fictional architect Howard Roark. According to Rome, any «heroic in virtue» should be referred to by the title «Venerable». Nominally, a consolidated «Venerable» has as yet no feast day, and no churches may be built in his honor, and his very presence in heaven is unsure; that depends on the next step, which happens when just one miracle is proved (beatification). In Barcelona there are people eagerly searching for a second miracle, because if it arrives the candidate will be impelled to full canonization by the pope. This double somersault would be enough to match the scaffold built by Lacan to explain perversion.

After the beatification and sanctification of Gaudí, the Holy Family would easily metamorphose into a mausoleum to the Glory of Saint Antonio Gaudí, a monument to the Biggest Architect ever. Whether or not some pious predictions are honored, it's sure that once the building is complete (2020?) there will be no urgency to celebrate a new saint in the calendar of saints' days, because Gaudí mummy possibly will embody all surrounding «reality», and will get into direct competition with the whole and entire temple. Somehow the virtuality of the hungry media market and the pervasiveness of the kitsch has assured the pass of Gaudí to posterity.

The huge central dome will be the most superb, cyclopean achievement to lionize Gaudí. It will be the Phallus opposite to the desperate desexualization that aims to demonstrate the aforementioned Commission.

In summary, both approaches to Gaudí are right and correct, the secular one which forms the main contents of this text, only purportedly lascivious, and the religious one, fervent and God-fearing. And our argument is that no controversy should exist between the

two positions. The large number of masonic icons (rosicrucians, dragons, hieroglyphics, abacuses, emblems ...) of the multifaceted work of Gaudí, on the other side, will be but a footnote to the page in the media communication miracle that is taking place in Barcelona.